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How Will the Pledge Be Redeemed?

The flow of official "background" wordage on the Cuban invasion flop has done very little yet to fix the responsibility for the failure and all its damage to the U.S. position in the eyes of the world.

There is no question, by now, that the U.S. played a decisive part. President Kennedy's sober acceptance of responsibility (as against blaming anything on the previous administration) "for the events of the past few days" referred to some definite meshing of U.S. policy with the assault of the Cuban exiles.

United States participation extended as far as the deep involvement which has been charged to the CIA—with the miscalculations reflecting gravely on that agency's skill and prudence—but it is still hard to believe that the administration would have made such a heavy commitment without being prepared to see it through to a successful overthrow of the Castro clique. Which the United States most certainly was capable of doing, and still is.

The New York Times' James Reston gives one version of the nature of the U.S. commitment, while suggesting both the weakness in the strategy and a course for the future: "Nevertheless, this is not the time for sudden action, but for a little more careful reflection and staff work than went into the original decision to allow the Cuban refugees to engage the prestige of the United States (italics ours)."

But whether the American role was so largely permissive or not and whatever the miscalculations and ineptness that went into it, the crucial problem for the President and the country now is how to do what the President has said will yet be done—that is, to keep faith with the Cuban people and to root out the spot of Communist contamination of the hemisphere which the Castro regime represents. And this, in the face of the strength and new prestige which have accrued to Castro as the result of the invasion's defeat.

Mr. Reston argues that the President should not yield to the political temptation to recoup U.S. losses by some early, direct move against Castro. In this, he may be right. It could be argued, too, that the idea of an American-fueled Cuban rebellion was blown into too many pieces last week to ever be put together again.

This point isn't Mr. Reston's, however. A point he does make, though, and which can be seriously questioned is that there is no particular

rush about dealing with the Castro-Soviet threat in Cuba. He says in effect that the real danger will come if Castro tries to use his military power against some other state in the hemisphere: "At that point, the United States can wipe him out, with the requisite sanction of the law on its side."

That would be true, of course. But this strategy assumes that a Castro military action is the device most likely to be used to enlarge the Communist beachhead in the Americas. It is far more probable, however, that Communist power would be spread from Cuba, not by some military action but by the route of infiltration or by the same kind of internal action which brought the Castro crew itself to power.

The United States has learned a hard, costly lesson in the Cuban debacle, and certainly it would not be wise to plunge off hastily and rashly into some new venture. But the President has correctly appraised the danger and has properly pledged its removal—if not by collective hemispheric measures, then by the United States itself. In this, it would scarcely be wise or realistic to wait for the excuse of a military thrust by Castro—no more than it would be to wait for the erection of Soviet launching pads on Cuban soil.